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LBJ to Appoint Otepka?

Plan in Works for New Central Security Agency

By RALPH de TOLEDANO

When Otto Otepka, one of the State Department's top security officers, was pushed out of his job, there was loud lamentation among those who have seen subversive infiltration of the federal government assuming frightening proportions. Mr. Otepka, highly expert in his field, had been doing an outstanding job—as his efficiency ratings showed—and it seemed like an ominous forewarning of things to come—that the powers that be should have prevented him from doing the job he knows so well.

The departure of Mr. Otepka did result in a dangerous slackening in security procedures at the State Department—as hearings before the Senate Internal Security subcommittee have shown. And it encouraged other touchy agencies to fol-



The State Department and the conservative movement would be shocked if, as some reports have it, LBJ appoints Otepka to the new agency.

low suit, much to the concern of those members of Congress who keep an eye on the federal establishment.

But a change is in the works, if President Johnson is not dissuaded from putting into effect plans that have been maturing for some time.

According to authoritative sources on Capitol Hill and at the White House, Mr. Johnson has decided to remove from State Department control all of its personnel security functions. That would mean, among other things, that the security office which Mr. Otepka headed—abolished by Secretary of State Dean Rusk in order to get rid of what he considered a too-zealous official and then set up again under conditions that left it thoroughly feeble—will be reconstituted.

A new federal organization, the Central Security Agency, will be set up to handle all personnel investigations and the evaluation of all files. Where, in the past, State Department officials passed on the security of those they themselves had hired, the new agency will be able to bring objectivity to this sensitive area.

A report on this proposal has been written by the Senate Judiciary Committee. It will be issued in the near future, the timing to be determined by the facts of legislative life. A bill has also been drafted, embodying the White House proposal, and has the support of the powerful Republican minority leader, Sen. Everett McKinley Dirksen. His name, in fact, will be one of those attached to the bill.

What is interesting and slightly incredible is the word, from sources that have proved themselves to be very reliable, that Otto Otepka will be offered the important post of chief evaluator within the Central Security Agency. If this is, in fact, President Johnson's intention, there will be loud moans where State Department officials congregate.

With Mr. Otepka in the job, the tried-and-true bureaucratic method of forestalling official investigation—the claim that documents have disappeared or never existed—will not work. Mr. Otepka knows where the documents are and what they say. He knows where all the bodies are buried. And he can counter the denials of State Department foot-draggers with character and verve.

The question being asked here is this: why has President Johnson moved at this time? Is he sitting on evidence of consistent security leaks from the State Department and other federal agencies? Is he thinking of the political impact of a court case in which Mr. Otepka could tell all?

Whatever Mr. Johnson's motives may be, the net gainer will be the American people. A Central Security Agency with Otto Otepka as its chief evaluator can only add to the health and safety of the United States government.

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